

February 20, 2023

Maryland General Assembly
Room 251
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Senate Bill 433 - Economic Development - Woman- and Minority-Owned Shellfish
Aquaculture Enterprise Fund

Position: Support

To the Maryland General Assembly,

I am writing to provide feedback and support regarding Senate Bill 433 which aims to establish the Women- and Minority- Owned Shellfish Aquaculture Enterprise Fund. While I am not a resident of Maryland, this Bill is of significance importance to me. I write to you as a food systems and food justice professional with over 15 years of experience and a Professional Science Master (PSM) Degree in Ocean Food Systems from the University of New England. I am a Grants Specialist Consultant for the Ecological Aquaculture Foundation while also employed as a Grants Manager at a leading agricultural food systems nonprofit organization.

My PSM thesis, "[Adopting Principles of Food Justice for Equitable Oyster Aquaculture Industry Development](#)," established recommendations to integrate food justice principles into mid-Atlantic aquaculture industry management to facilitate entry into the industry among interested BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) individuals and to promote socioeconomic diversity among business-owners. The set of recommendations provided in my thesis include facilitating access to capital for interested entrepreneurs through the following actions: establishing equity-based no-interest or low-interest loans and grants; expanding on existing grant and loan programs; integrating an equity lens into application review processes to prioritize applicants of color; providing Technical Assistance in acquiring capital (e.g., applying for grants and loans) and sustaining profit (e.g., business planning) with a goal of spurring community economic development; and promoting livable wages in the industry to facilitate advancement.

As I am sure members of the General Assembly are aware, MD's historic oyster industry was built by the labor of Black oystermen and women. However, structural and systemic racism created barriers that prohibited many Black oystermen and women from advancing within the industry. Now, as today's oyster aquaculture industry grows, Black watermen and women continue to play a significant role, but there is a lack of racial diversity at the business ownership level. In fact, at the time of my thesis research (2021), one person interviewed stated their belief that among the 168 aquaculture lease holders in MD, only one was a Person of Color. My thesis identified 8 main barriers to entry (listed below) that prevent diversity within the industry at the business-ownership level, linking them to historic barriers to advancement among watermen of color. Access to Capital was a key barrier identified in this research. Senate Bill 433 is an important step in reducing this barrier.



This Bill will facilitate entry into MD’s aquaculture industry among entrepreneurial women and entrepreneurs of color. MD’s growing industry has the potential to increase and diversify the state’s oyster growers, business owners, workforce, and consumers. Industry growth among socio-economically diverse entrepreneurs would help to promote healthy ecosystems, bolster economic development, and increase access to nutritious food among consumers. Senate Bill 433 is an important, critical step. However, the Women- and Minority- Owned Shellfish Aquaculture Enterprise Fund should not be developed in isolation from the principles of Food Justice. As identified in my research, a critical step in the successful administration of the Fund should include the adoption of a food justice framework among the administrating organization. Furthermore, the Fund should be developed with an equity-lens and Fund administration, application, and decision-making processes should be equity-based.

As an expert in the field, I support Senate Bill 433 with the recommendations that the administrating body adopt a Food Justice Framework and that the Fund is developed and administered with an equity lens. Thank you for the opportunity to share my feedback, and for your consideration of this very important Bill. Please feel free to contact me should additional information from my research or field of work be needed.

Thank you,

Cristina Sandolo, PSM
Grants Specialist
Ecological Aquaculture Foundation
csandolo@gmail.com
914-356-4493

ATTACHMENT:

Excerpts from thesis: “Adopting Principles of Food Justice for Equitable Oyster Aquaculture Industry Development”

Barriers to Entry in Mid-Atlantic Oyster Aquaculture

1. Waterfront Access
2. Access to Capital / Income
3. Experience on the Water
4. Exposure to the Industry
5. Exclusiveness within the Industry
6. Racial and Gender Bias within the Industry
7. Building Social Capital / Protests
8. Leasing and Permitting Processes

Recommendations for Industry Development. These recommendations apply to management agencies and support organizations:

1. Adopt a Framework for Food Justice

State agencies should adopt use of a racial equity tool, an antiracism tool, or a Food Justice framework for use throughout departments’ planning, decision making, strategy and

policy development, planning and programming. A variety of tools exist that can shift planning and management efforts towards Food Justice.

Examples include:

- a) **Five Points of Intervention.** Horst (2017) reviews the “areas” of practicing Food Justice developed by Slocum and Cadieux (2015) and adapts them into 5 “Points of Intervention” (“Inequity and trauma; Exchange; Land; Labor; and Democratic Processes”) with details for each (p. 53). Horst (2017) suggests that a simple tool like this can guide planners through practicing reflexive planning and identifying opportunities and action steps for Food Justice-based planning.
- b) **Equity Lens.** Horst et al (2017) suggest the adoption of an equity lens as a tool in planning for Food Justice. Adoption and usage of such a tool would be comparable to utilizing an environmental impact statement. An equity lens would guide decision makers through a process that would analyze potential impacts from a justice-focused perspective, supporting strategy development, decision-making, participation of historically marginalized communities, the identification of systemic barriers to equity, and opportunities for addressing barriers. Seattle, for example, adopted a racial equity lens tool as a result of establishing the City’s Race and Social Justice Initiative (Horst et al, 2017).
- c) **Equitable Food Oriented Development (EFOD) Criteria.** The emerging Equitable Food Oriented Development (EFOD) field offers a framework based in “community ownership, asset building, and health equity in the food system” (DAISA Enterprises, 2019, p. 9). Indicators of EFOD are stated as: equity- and justice-first; place-based; using market-based or business strategies; community leadership development or community organizing; and community ownership; these criteria are described in EFOD Collaborative’s “Building Community Power” white paper (EFOD Collaborative, 2019).

2. Utilize the Themes of Food Justice to Eliminate Barriers to Entry

The below recommendations, and their relationship to the identified Themes of Food Justice and the Barriers to Entry, are illustrated in [Table 1 \(Thesis Appendix\)](#).

- a) **Eliminate Racial and Gender Bias, Acknowledge Leaders of Color, and Acknowledge and Eliminate Exploitation and Harm**
 - i. Hire a consultant to lead all staff through 1) antiracism training and 2) adopting an antiracism, equity, or Food Justice Framework. Equip staff with deep antiracism and anti-bias knowledge and skills; Require antiracism training and use of Framework at all levels.
 - ii. Equip staff with the history of the industry: Create ways of integrating the history of watermen of color into staff training, onboarding, and team meetings, ongoing throughout the year.
 - iii. Memorialize Black talent, leadership, and labor: Integrate the history of watermen of color into management plans, industry entry processes (e.g., via information, permitting and application discussions).
 - iv. Develop and publicize multilingual material throughout the industry.
- b) **Facilitate access to capital for interested entrepreneurs**
 - i. Establish equity-based no-interest or low-interest loans and grants. Reynolds (2015) notes that the Community Food Funders coalition’s prioritization of

organizations that are working towards social justice and are “led by people of color” could be seen as a model for these types of financial programs.

- ii. Expand on existing grant and loan programs. Integrate equity lens into application review processes to prioritize applicants of color.
- iii. Provide Technical Assistance in acquiring capital (e.g., applying for grants and loans) and sustaining profit (e.g., business planning) with a goal of spurring community economic development.
- iv. Promote livable wages in the industry to facilitate advancement.

c) Create More Waterfront Access

- i. Establish waterfront workspace and dock space for use by aquaculture growers.
- ii. Provide dock space and working waterfront space to descendants of watermen of color and interested entrepreneurs of color.
- iii. Promote innovation in the industry, such as development of systems that require less onshore activity.

d) Boost the buying market

- i. Integrate goals in equitable food access into oyster management plans and industry development.
- ii. Invest in state-wide marketing and promotion, from a Food Justice perspective: Engage historically marginalized communities; tell the story of the history and the resurgence; build pride.
- iii. Support businesses through purchasing partnerships: initiate farm-to-institution programs for oyster producers to link to state universities, hospitals, and other institutions; establish or expand purchasing contracts for restoration programs; engage interested and active growers in planning.
- iv. Launch incentive programs (e.g., incentivize oyster purchases made with Federal Benefits) and other innovations: create purchasing power among historically marginalized communities through oyster incentive programs.
- v. Facilitate acquisition of shellfish handling certification for growers.

e) Boost Exposure to the Industry and to the History

- i. Invest in memorializing the history. Position families of Black oystermen as decisionmakers in planning memorials celebrating the individuals and acknowledging historic injustices.
- ii. Invest in organizations led by people of color that are positioned to amplify exposure to the industry, through community engagement and educational programming.
- iii. Establish apprenticeship, internship, and other compensated opportunities for engagement within state agencies, aquaculture businesses and supporting entities: partner with state universities, HBCU’s, community colleges, and city high schools.
- iv. Integrate history of the industry and industry resurgence into creative place-making initiatives in urban areas.

f) Modify the application and permitting processes

- i. Ensure that leases are not dependent on land ownership.
- ii. Eliminate public protests and protect growers from personal attacks: encourage bottom culture; conduct in depth community education highlighting coastal benefits of oyster aquaculture; Establish the “right to farm” in aquaculture;

Position businesses and activities that are beneficial to coastal ecosystems as priorities within state, county, and municipal development plans.

- iii.** Expand the development of pre-approved aquaculture areas.
- iv.** Integrate an equity lens into permit application review; expedite and incentivize descendants of watermen of color or applicants that demonstrate a need for loans and grants through the permitting process. Update all application review processes to improve timeliness; consider engaging interns or apprentices for support with application review, to build engagement with the industry.
- v.** Hold permitting and business plan technical assistance sessions for in-person assistance with applications; record sessions and make available to the public; provide time for one-on-one assistance with applications.